

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WESLEY S. TODD
Fighter Pilot, Marine Corps, World War II.

1997

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Todd, Wesley S b. (1921) Oral History Interview, 1997.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Wesley Todd, a Wauwatosa, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a Marine Corps fighter pilot in the Pacific during World War II. A student at the Citadel Military Academy (Charleston, South Carolina) when the war began, Todd talks of learning to fly through the Hawthorne Flying Service, his freshman orientation course, cadet training, and joining the Navy V5 program during his junior year. He mentions regional tensions, being considered a "Yankee," and not being allowed to eat one night after a showing of "Gone With the Wind." He received pre-flight instruction in Iowa City (Iowa), primary training at Glenview, advanced flying in Corpus Christi (Texas), and his commission as a Marine Corps second lieutenant. Volunteering to fly fighter aircraft, he learned to fly F4U Corsairs in the Mojave Desert. He speaks briefly of his first assignment to a torpedo-bomber squadron in Jacksonville, Florida. Joining the USS Essex, he comments on flying strikes against the Tokarizawa and Koisumi airfields near Tokyo, providing air cover for the landing at Iwo Jima, and covering the landing at Okinawa. He details the Okinawa campaign and tells of dropping important messages on the USS El Dorado during the struggle for Iwo Jima. Todd explains how they got coordinates for their targets, describes the process of landing on an aircraft carrier, and touches upon his fears of flying over land. Also discussed are techniques for flying close air support, helping rescue survivors of sinking ships, and learning he had completed all his missions. Using a fictitious person with the initials of the place where he was going in his letters, Todd tells how he was able to let his folks know where he was. He reveals what life aboard ship was like and touches upon his discharge when the USS Bunker Hill was hit by a kamikaze attack and returned to the United States for repair. He tells how elated people were on V-J Day in Hollywood (California) The interview closes with Todd verbalizing his use of the G.I. house loan and his fleeting interest in veterans organizations.

Biographical Sketch:

Wesley S. Todd (b. 1921), flew Corsair aircraft as a Marine Corps fighter pilot in the Pacific during World War II. He received two Distinguished Flying Crosses for his military service and returned home after completing all his required missions. After the war, Todd went into business with the Air-cooled Power Equipment Company that he and a friend started up. Todd settled in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996

Transcribed by Nathan King, 2003.

Transcription edited by Damon R. Bach, 2005.

Interview Transcription:

- Mark: Today's date is September the 26th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Wesley Todd, presently of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Pacific Theater, U.S. Marine Corps flyer in World War II. Good morning, thanks for driving in. I appreciate it.
- Todd: Glad to be here.
- Mark: Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military.
- Todd: I was born and raised in Milwaukee, born June 26th, 1921, and went to school in Milwaukee. When I was 5 years old, moved to Wauwatosa, where I graduated from Wauwatosa High. And from there, I went to the Citadel military college down in Charleston, South Carolina.
- Mark: So you were already interested in the military.
- Todd: Well, you know, you could hear the rumblings in Europe, and you know, you figured you probably would – everybody would be going in sooner or later. And it was September 2nd of 1939 that I left Milwaukee and went to Chicago and got on the Illinois Central for Charleston, matriculate at the Citadel. And the next morning, which was Sunday, September 3rd, I got up and went to the diner of the train, and the waiter put a newspaper in front of me, "England and France Declares War on Germany," and I will be at the Citadel by tonight [laughs]. So it was, you know, probably a good thing because you knew you were going in anyway, so. And I went to the Citadel, and I was in the infantry there, but I also learned to fly there at the Hawthorne Flying Service down in Charleston. It was run by Bevil Howard, who at that time was international aerobatic champion. And so I learned to fly there. Had I graduated from Citadel, I would have been in the infantry. My whole class graduated in 1943, and were in the infantry or field artillery, and my particular class, a lot of them ended up as second lieutenants in the Battle of the Bulge. But I enlisted in navy flying, V-5, they called it. And of course I already knew how to fly because I had learned there at Charleston, and went through navy flying first at pre-flight in Iowa City, which was nothing but athletics and ground school. And then Glenview was primary, then I went to Corpus Christi for both intermediate and advanced flying, and got my commission. But at some point in there, if you wanted to be a marine, you had to specify you did. And at that time – I don't know if it's still true or not – at that time, by definition, the Marine Corps could only be 10% of the Navy, and it was still the Secretary of the Navy, which at that time was James Forrestal. He was head of not only the Navy, but the Marine Corps, too, although the Marine Corps had a commandant also, which was Vandegriff at that time. And anyway, I chose to be a marine, and they accepted me, so on the day, July 16th of '43, I put on a marine uniform as a second lieutenant.
- Mark: Now, I want to go back to the Citadel experience too. Before I forget, why did you want to be a marine, particularly?

Todd: I don't know. I thought it was the toughest thing to be would be a marine fighter pilot. That's what I ended up being. As a matter of fact, my junior year, that's just before I left the Citadel, the army officers that were in charge at the Citadel were interviewing each junior because they were going to be seniors next year to be the ranking cadet officers, and they asked me what was my ambition in life, and I said to be a marine fighter pilot, and I was telling this to an army man, and he said, "That'll be all, Cadet Todd." [laughs]

Mark: Now, I'm interested in the experience of the Citadel. It's a little unusual, and it's of course then they have lax today so people know where it is and what it is and that sort of thing. Why don't you just describe for me the life of a cadet in –

Todd: Well, it's true that when you're a freshman in what they call the "orientation period," which is, you get down there early before most of the school is there except for the training cadre. It's very tough, and you find taxi cabs pulling up all day long taking kids back to their mommy. But you're kind of proud to go through it, you know. And it was – it was never anything terrible hazing. I mean, it was tough on you. Sometimes they hit you in the rear end with the flat end of a sabre or a broom, but I mean it wasn't anything that some people have written about that didn't happen when I was down there. As far as I know, it doesn't happen at the Citadel, but some people say that it does happen at some military institutions. But the whole freshman year, you know, you have to sit on the forward three inches of your chair when you eat your dinner, and eat a square meal, you know, like this. And incidentally, that was the year *Gone With the Wind* came out.

Mark: Oh, '39?

Todd: Yeah. And so they had a special showing for cadets downtown. And that noon when we came back after the showing – every mess had a mess carver, which was an upperclassman, and then on each side, there's three cadets – and the mess carver said, he said, "Mr. God Damn Todd," he said, "You know, Sherman didn't give my folks anything to eat when he marched through Atlanta. You don't get anything to eat today," because I was a Yankee. But it was little things like that. You laughed when you got back in your room about things like that.

Mark: See, I was just going to ask now. It's a state school. State of South Carolina, you were a Yankee from up north –

Todd: Yes, see, but it takes federal money. At that time, it seems to me that the federal government was giving to the school as much as you were paying for your tuition in order to get officers in their military, you know.

Mark: So as a Yankee, you weren't a distinct minority by any means –

Todd: Oh, well you were a minority. There were other Yankees. Oh we - if you talked like a Yankee, you were a Yankee [laughs]. Actually, I didn't consider myself all Yankee – my mother was from Baton Rouge, my dad was from Atlanta, but they lived up here, you know.

Mark: Um, and so you left the Citadel, then –

- Todd: Well, I left at the end of my junior year because I wanted to pursue aviation.
- Mark: Now, there were some who washed out, as you mentioned. Were there others like you who left to pursue other military options? Because, you know the war had started by this time.
- Todd: Yeah, some fellas even went to Canada, joined the RCAF. They wanted to get going. And in those days people don't – you feel kind of funny saying, but people really wanted to get in and defend the country. It wasn't this business of running away.
- Mark: Yeah, which is very different than the experience 20, 30 years after that.
- Todd: That's right.
- Mark: Why do you suppose there was that enthusiasm?
- Todd: Well, I think for one thing, when we were attacked, December 7th, nobody wants the United States to be attacked, and everybody – oh, there were some guys that – I heard stories of people chopping off a finger so they wouldn't have to go, but I didn't know anybody like that.
- Mark: Now, this training – this flight school that you did in South Carolina – was that part of your program at the Citadel, or was that something –
- Todd: Yes, they offered it. That was part of what they called CPT – Civilian Pilot Training. And some of the money – it only cost me \$45 to get my private license. The rest of it was paid for by the government, but I had to promise to go into one of the services as a pilot.
- Mark: So, you go into the Marine Corps, get trained as a pilot. What happens next?
- Todd: Well I – of course I got my training as a Navy cadet, now I'm in the Marine Corps, and the first thing I flew was a TBF, a torpedo-bomber. I wanted fighters, but that's what we got. And we went to Jacksonville, Florida flying torpedo-bombers. We flew anti-sub patrol off the coast.
- Mark: For real. I mean there were really submarines out there.
- Todd: Yeah, yeah, but frankly I never saw one when I was flying anti-submarine. But then we were transferred to Santa Barbara, California as a torpedo-bomber squadron. And one day, an orderly came through the ready room and said, "Say, we need fighter pilots. Anybody want to be one, sign up." And I put my name and my wingman's name on the list, then I forgot to tell him [laughs]. I didn't think it really meant that much. And the next day, they said "Cadet McMattis, and Cadet Todd, here's your orders to report to Mojave, California to a fighter squadron flying Corsairs."
- Mark: Now, that's a very glamorous – that's perhaps the most glamorous part of military aviation. I imagine there were a lot of other guys who wanted to do such a thing.

Todd: Hmm.

Mark: But I was wondering how competitive it was to become a fighter pilot. In your experience –

Todd: Oh, I don't know who else put their name on that list, but I know that he and I were the only two that went to Mojave that particular time, to this squadron that needed pilots.

Mark: Now, I've interviewed several Air Force pilots. I think you're the first Marine pilot I've interviewed. If you're not a fighter pilot, what other sorts of aviators are there in the Marines?

Todd: Well, there's torpedo-bombers, there's dive bombers, and there's like flying PBYS - these big twin-engine, very slow airplanes that land on the water, rescuing guys – and transports. They had similar to the DC-3 or flying transport, transporting troops around. In fact, that's what Tyrone Power was in the Marine Corps. He flew a DC-3 in the Marines.

Mark: So you get signed up as a fighter pilot. Why don't you just describe the sort of preparation and training –

Todd: Well, I joined VMF-213. "V" means "heavier than air," and "M" is "Marine," and "F" means "Fighter." Number 213, the name of it was the Hellhawk Squadron, which had just returned from Guadalcanal. So these fellas were all veterans. They called it "The Canal." And so we joined them, and we went through all fighter training. Various tactics – dogfights, they called it – individual battle practice, which would be dogfights. And marksmanship – shooting at a target and that type of thing. Then one day we got orders that we were going to pull out the next day, didn't know where. And I remember I had a car I wanted to sell, so I drove into Hollywood and sold my car. It was a 1937 Buick – and four door, red, leather seats. Sold it for \$400 [laughs]. And the next day, we got on the Ticonderoga, in Los Angeles, which is an Essex class carrier, and went only to Hawaii, where we were again training. Then after training there, one day we got orders, and I reported to the Essex just before the Iwo Jima campaign. And I was on the Essex during the whole Iwo Jima campaign, which was in – well first, we made the first fighter strikes on the Japanese homeland. We hit – in Tokyo – we hit Tokorozawa and Koizumi airfields. And the Japs came up to defend, and so forth. I didn't get credit for any planes on that particular, although I know I got hits, I didn't get credit for any of 'em.

Mark: So this is your first combat –

Todd: First combat. I remember seeing Mt. Fuji on a dawn hop. That was my first combat. But then we went right down to cover the landing at Iwo Jima. And incidentally, I had told my folks that I knew I would probably carrier-based. And you're not part of ship's company where you can actually say, "I'm on this particular ship." But you can't say where you are. So I said, I will put a P.S. on any correspondence I send you, and I'll ask about some fictitious person, which will be the initials of where I'm going, or am. And so I wrote 'em a later, and I said, "How is Inez Jacobs?" Because when we pulled out of Hawaii, that's when they told us we were going to Iwo, since you couldn't get back and send any mail before this thing. So – but I sent this letter, "How is Inez Jacobs," and my mother told me later that she was driving with my dad down Wauwatosa Avenue, when the news came on that the Marines are pounding Iwo Jima, and then it rang a bell

[laughter]. And anyway, I was on the Essex during the whole Iwo campaign. And then we went - we pulled into Ulithi for R&R, a little rest. And then our squadron got orders to go home. They'd been out there long enough. I, as yet, did not have credit for shooting down an airplane, and neither did McMannis, who was my wingman. And so there was a spot for four people over on the Bunker Hill, even though our squadron was going home. And so there were four of us - that said we want - no, there were six of us that wanted to go, and there were four slots. And so we drew cards, and four of us got over to the Bunker Hill. And that's when we went out. The next thing was the Okinawa campaign, which was April 1st, Easter Sunday and April Fool's Day all in one day, a Sunday. And we covered the landings, and while I was out there on - actually it was March 18th, I shot down two Jap Zeroes, and got credit for those. Those are the only two I actually got credit for. But that time, you were getting shots, you know, where more than one guy was on it. Oh, then on May 11th, we were over Okinawa, and giving ground troop support where they - you had a grid map and they would say, "Hit grid so-and-so and so-and-so," and then the guys are in the trenches down there, you know. And on the way home, our base the Bunker Hill, the codename was Viceroy Base, and our squadron was Viceroy 11-1. And so we called on the radio, and asked for what time pancake would be, and then they would come back and tell you in code what time you were gonna land, because they don't want the Japs to know when we're taking on planes, because that's a good time to attack. Well, we didn't get any answer, and I remember there were 16 of us flying Corsairs, and we're looking back and forth and wondering why we - and then we saw the stream of smoke. And we figured it was, and the Bunker Hill had been hit by two kamikazes, and there were 473 killed, and 600 and some odd casualties. And so we - guys were jumping overboard, and so we would - and then there were destroyers following the carrier. And we would - when we saw somebody in the water, we would zoom them so the destroyer would see they had to go pick 'em up, you know. Well, finally, we started to get low on gas, and the Enterprise called us, and said that we could come aboard them, because we couldn't land on the Bunker Hill. So, all 16 of us landed on the Enterprise, and we spent the night there. And the Bunker Hill was the flagship of the fleet at that time. Admiral Mark Mitcher, who was actually a Wisconsin admiral, was the head of it. And they brought him aboard the Enterprise while we were there, too. They brought him over in a boatsman's chair - you know, that chair that goes over on wires, you know, and you bang your - you're spinning around while the destroyers that brought 'em over is trying to go formation on you. But they brought him aboard, and he gave the sixteen of us a class 2 priority to go home, said that "these fellas have been out here long enough." And so then we flew to Yontan Airfield. The Americans had taken Yontan from the Japs already, although it was a coral runway, and we flew over there and gave 'em our airplanes. And as a matter of fact, one of the guys on the way back said, "Let's hit Amami O shima." "O shima" means "island" in Japanese. And hit Amami, and on the way back, because we knew this was our last day of combat. And finally we decided not to do it. Why take a chance and lose somebody, you know, on your last day? So we just landed on the coral runway at Okinawa, gave 'em our airplanes, and then we had to wait for transportation back to where the Bunker Hill would eventually pull in. They threw all the bodies overboard, and all the planes overboard, and everything. And so we finally got our ride in a DC-3 from Okinawa back to Guam. And Ulithi, where the fleet would pull in, is 150 miles southwest of Guam, and so we then took - I can't remember how we got there. It's some other kind of boat. And then we went back aboard the Bunker Hill. That's when you find out who's there and who wasn't anymore. And we had to be deloused. Anybody who had been on Okinawa had to be deloused, where they squirt you all over your body [laughs] to make sure you don't have lice. And then we came home on

her, the Bunker Hill. And I was always amazed at the American ingenuity, that before we pulled into Bremerton, Washington, on the morning we were going to pull in, we couldn't even see land yet. There were engineers already onboard the Bunker Hill. I don't know how they got there. They were landed by helicopter or something. And they already had blueprints of how they were going to repair this thing. You know, after all, two kamikazes had hit it, plus two bombs. They each dropped their bombs first, then went in themselves, and there was a lot of damage. But they had somehow gotten pictures of all that back to the states, and had blueprints sittin' there of how – before we even pulled in – we're gonna start repairing this thing. I was just amazed at that. So that was it, and then –

Mark: I'd like to go back and cover some of the campaigns a little bit.

Todd: OK.

Mark: And cover some of the sort of social life in the military. Was there something that distinguished the Iwo Jima from the Okinawa campaigns? Or did they all seem pretty much the same?

Todd: Well, Iwo Jima – in both cases they wanted to take over the island as a base. And when we hit Iwo Jima, first we hit the Tokyo area – the Koizumi and Tokorozawa Airfield – to throw the Japs off that there was going to be an invasion. So we went up there and hit them with the fleets, and they figured this was the big thing. And then we buzzed straight down to Iwo to cover the landing there. But, you know, Iwo Jima was only three miles long, and Mt. Suribachi, the code name was "Mt. Hoprock." But that was a very violent battle, whereas Okinawa was 60 miles long, and 10 miles across. And one particular day, when I was off of Iwo Jima, when the fleet was, I had the squadron duty officer job up in the ready room. You had to take turns as, like officer of the day. And I was just about ready to go off at midnight, and I got a call from flagplot, and they said, "We want somebody to volunteer for a message drop for tomorrow over – off of Iwo." And I said, "Well, I'm going off there right now, off duty – I'll take it." Well, I went back to my state room, and an orderly came in here. At that time, I was only a first lieutenant. They said, "This takes a captain or better. Who's your division leader?" And I said, "Captain," – his name was Captain Parks, so we called him "Pappy." I'm trying to think of what his real first name was. But it was "Pappy" Parks – he was 29 [laughs]. So he came into my state room, he says, "Thanks for volunteering for me," [laughs]. It was just in fun. So, I got to fly wing on him the next day, and we dropped – he had all the messages. You get three of 'em. They're all the same, but you have to drop this on a certain ship. And they said the ship will be flying the Charlie-Peter flag, which is a checkered flag. So you had to find out, off of Iwo, where the landing ships were, and find a ship with a Charlie-Peter flag. And you dropped this message on that ship. But, you know, all during the campaign, they're sending messages in code over the air, and they're flashing with these flashing lights, you know, between ships. I never did find out, of course, what this message was, but it was so secret that they didn't do either of those. They wanted this delivered personally. And after the war, I found out. I was reading an article in the Saturday Evening Post that that – I had it in my logbook that I dropped it on the U.S.S. El Dorado, which they had entered in my logbook back on the ship. And I saw in the Saturday Evening Post that the U.S.S. El Dorado was General "Howlin' Mad" Smith's flagship where he was heading the whole Iwo campaign. So this was a message from Admiral Mitcher, head of the fleet, to General "Howlin' Mad" Smith. His real name was Howland, but they called him

“Howlin’ Mad” Smith, which must have been a pretty important message. But anyway, as we took off, I think we – maybe we got – we hit the thing with the second. We had to make one pass, and he dropped it in the water. Then we made another pass with the wheels down, the flaps down to go as slow as possible. But we finally hit it, and so then they called and said, “Could you look for a TBF that’s down out – probably down in the water. Could you do a search for ‘em?” So they gave us about the coordinates of where this thing might be. And when we got out there, now we’re out of sight of land, and we flew a square search, which means that you go this direction, then you go this direction. Then next time around, you double the thing, and keep doing that, keep doing that, keep doing that. And finally, we never found the TBF, but we were getting low on fuel. And so we radioed back to whatever frequency they had called us on, and said, “We have to go back to the fleet now, because we’re getting low on fuel.” So that’s when Pappy said to me, my nickname was “Toddy,” he says, “Hey Toddy, would you mind navigating back? My plotting board is stuck underneath my instrument panel.” And I think he really was lost [laughs.] Because all this time, the fleet is moving, and we’re out of sight of land, you really don’t know where to start from unless you’ve been keeping real track of where you were. So anyway, I did navigate back, and I always kidded him about that. He was later killed, a few days later than that.

Mark: In these campaigns, how often are you flying? Are you flying every day? All day? Or every two days, or?

Todd: Oh, no. No. But it’s not like the Air Force. The Air Force after twenty-some-odd missions, they sent you home.

Mark: Yeah, on a bomber, yeah.

Todd: When you’re – well, the fighters too.

Mark: Is that right?

Todd: And when you’re with the fleet – whenever there’s some flying to do, you’re there. You’re the ones that have to do it, so you don’t count, you know. But there were both Navy squadrons and Marine squadrons on the carrier. But you flew whenever your squadron had the hop. I don’t know how they decided that.

Mark: But I suppose what I’m getting at – are you up there every day, or –

Todd: Usually everyday. Usually everyday. Well, no, not every day. You were in combat three days. Over the third night, you’re pulled out of the combat area. When you wake up in the morning, you see that the refueling ships are coming up, the re-provisioning ships, the mail ships are coming up, and they’re coming in on your carrier to give you fuel, give you the mail, and re-provisioning. And then over the next night, they pull back into the combat area. When you wake up, you’re in the combat area.

Mark: And in these – what’s your essential duty as ground support? Air support for the ground troops.

Todd: That’s right.

Mark: I was just wondering if you could describe what your targets were in some specific way. I mean, was it armored columns or infantry concentrations –

Todd: Well, you did – sometimes you didn't know. You had these grid maps.

Mark: [unintelligible] grid.

Todd: Yeah, and you would narrow it down to this grid, and then to the smaller grid, and to the smaller grid. And then, since there had been mistakes made of guys strafing or dive-bombing some of our troops. Then, after we got – first thing you did, you reported to a frequency on Okinawa. And you had to call a codename – some of these codenames were kind of comical. One was “Momma's monthly,” I remember that [laughs.] And another one was “Navel lint.” “Navel lint, this is Viceroy Eleven, are you there?” And this is some guy in a foxhole, and I said, “How are things going on down there?” And he said, “Well, I don't know, I haven't looked out yet today, but here's the target we want you to hit.” Then he would give you the grids. But then, since there'd been mistakes made, they would shoot a white, phosphorous bomb over to where this target was, you know, with like a mortar. And so you'd see that. But now, since these mistakes were made, we had to make a dry run on this. This is after the Okinawa campaign was in for a while. And making a dry run was very dangerous, because by this time, now the Japs know where you're gonna hit, and they've got everything all tuned in, ready for you, you know. But that's what we had to do, and then they say, “OK, you've got it. Go hit it.” And then we'd go down and hit it, you know, either with bombs or strafing, whatever – or rockets. We had rockets, too.

Mark: Taking off on a carrier, landing on a carrier – it seems like a –

Todd: Well, actually –

Mark: unusual experience –

Todd: The taking off – there's two catapults forward. And if, on a hop, those two catapults would be manned by the squadron leaders. And what they did, if there's sixteen planes in their squadron, they would be shot off just before you get into the wind. So they hadn't pulled into the wind, but just before they'd gotten into the wind, they'd shoot these guys off, and they would go straight ahead thirty seconds for every plane in their squadron. So they would go, if there's sixteen planes, they'd go ahead eight minutes. Then they'd start a slow 180 turn, like this, and as we came up right here, we'd join up on 'em, and by the time we got right over the fleet again, we're all rendezvoused. But in what they call a “scramble,” when they hit general quarters, they bang on this klaxon. It goes “Bang bang bang bang – ta ta tada ta ta tada.” That's general quarters. You get up there, and you get in an airplane. And a couple times I got on the catapult, because it's the first ones up there, because you want to get up to – the first ones you want to get in the air because there's enemies coming at your ship. But actually the landing on the carrier was more interesting. You'd break off in groups of four. You'd circle until you saw the carrier starting to turn into the wind. Then you'd get so like if the carrier's going in this direction, you're going to land this way, you'd come up here in groups of four, and come back here, and then you string out.

And so the landing signal officer's standing right here, he's picking you up, and he's got two paddles. They don't do it this way anymore. And when he give you this, this is the "Roger," in the phoenetic alphabet, in morse code [semaphore?]. When he picks you up like this, that means, "I've got you, don't you dare look in your cockpit again at your instruments, because I'll tell you what to do." And like, "F," in the morse code [semaphore?], "F" means you're fast. This is "Low and slow," this is "High." Then, when you get right about here, and all you can see then is this landing signal officer, who's right down here, because in the Corsair, your nose is so long that you couldn't even see the island of the carrier. That's all you can see is him, right here. And when he gives you this, that means you chop your throttle, quick duck your nose to kind of pick out the center of the deck, and flare. And your hook is – you know, you've got eleven wires that you could catch. Then you land, and as soon as you land, they pulled – they pull you, or are pushing you back, to take the tension off the wires so they can take the hook out. And while they're pushing you back, you unlock your wings because you're going to have to fold 'em. You open up your oil cooler flaps and your cowl flaps, because you had an air-cooled engine, you didn't want your engine to overhead. Then there's an enlisted man down here, usually a chief, who was like this, and that means "Pull up your hook, we got you unhooked." So, you'd pull up your hook, and this was something that was hard to get used to. You'd give it full throttle, and then you'd take your hand off the throttle, and you hit the lever that's going to fold your wings – you've already locked them – and then you reach up here and grab your throttle and pull it back, because you're going to have to stop up here. There's planes spotted forward. Today, they have a canted deck so there aren't any planes spotted forward, but in those days there were. So, but then as soon as you actuated your wing folding, you'd pull back on the throttle, then you'd get on the brakes, "Eet eet eet oop!" like this, then you'd hear, "Kaboom!" this guy landing right where you were, this guy right behind you. Of course, if you're not out of the gear in time, there's somebody that gives the landing signal officer some kind of a tap on the shoulder or something to say, "Give him a wave-off." And then he does this, and you around again.

Mark: And this process takes how long?

Todd: They – when we were – if I'm not mistaken, when we were really trying to take 'em aboard as fast as possible, it was 17 seconds.

Mark: Wow.

Todd: Now that really, you know, that actually is pretty long. Say I started right now. Ok, now say I just caught the wire. That's five seconds. Yeah, I'm sure it was seventeen seconds. That's ten. And then you were out of there, and there was one landing right behind you.

Mark: So it takes longer to describe than it did to actually land the plane, fold up your wings, and get out of the way?

Todd: Yeah, yeah, right.

Mark: Now you flew a lot over just water. I guess I'm just interested in what it's like up there.

- Todd: Well, you know, in those days, we couldn't wait to get over water, because everything we flew over was Japanese hell.
- Mark: I suppose.
- Todd: Today – I fly today – and I like to be over land [laughs]. I fly an aerobatic plane today. It's not built for cross-country, and it had a fixed landing gear. So when I'm over water, that's when you kid about the fact that your engine goes into automatic rough. You start listening, "What'd I hear there?" In those days, though, you couldn't wait to get back over water. Well, that first hop over Tokyo, we lost Baldy Carlson. He eventually was a POW and he got out alright, but as we were trying – we knew he was hit – and as we were trying to get us all back over the water to the east of Tokyo, he finally lost all his oil pressure, and he says, "Well, OK. Here I go." He says, "I'll see you guys after the war at Mike Lyman's." Mike Lyman's was a place on Hollywood Boulevard where everybody congregated. And he landed, and after the war, he said that the farmers and so forth were kind of goin' after him. But when the soldiers found him, they stopped – they were trying to beat him and stuff. They put him in a prison camp, and he was in that prison camp with Pappy Boyington, and I don't know if you remember his name, until the end of the war. And so he got out alright.
- Mark: Oh, the plane. I mean, if you could just describe the Corsair, what it's like to fly the Corsair, what you liked about it, and perhaps what you didn't like about it. Because I find a lot of the aviators have strong opinions about their planes –
- Todd: Well, we loved the cor[sair] – I would love to fly one again. See, the Navy got it originally, but they didn't like that long nose to bring it aboard a carrier, so they gave it to the Marines. When the Navy started running low on fighter pilots, we brought a squadron aboard the Essex. And so then they said, "Well, we'll take 'em again, too." So they started flying the Corsair off the carrier again too. But it was a blind plane, even on landing on a runway, when you get in a three point position, it blocks your forward view.
- Mark: You can't see, you just take it on faith that you're going to –
- Todd: Well, you make a short final approach, yeah. You could never make these long, final approaches like you see some people make. But if you're like this, you're looking at the runway just till the last second.
- Mark: In terms of maneuverability, and that sort of thing, compared to the Japanese –
- Todd: Well, the Japanese could turn inside of us, but we could outclimb 'em and outdive 'em. And the Japanese did not give their pilots much protection. We had some –
- Mark: In terms of armor.
- Todd: Yeah, some of the armor we had in the plane gave the pilots some protection. They didn't have that.

- Mark: Um, now you mentioned Pappy Boyington –
- Todd: Yeah.
- Mark: He had a rather famous book and a television series. Perhaps when people think of Marine pilots, they think of Pappy Boyington. Of course, he was land-based as I remember.
- Todd: That's right. He had been in the Flying Tigers over China.
- Mark: So, in terms of your everyday life, when you're not flying – in your quarters, and that sort of thing – and you were on a ship. I was just wondering if you could describe sort of what it was like to be on the ship, where you stayed, and what you ate.
- Todd: Well, when we came aboard the ship, as I say, we were not ship's company – we were the flight group. None of us really were salty, you know, like you're supposed to be. As a matter of fact, I remember our commanding officer having a meeting one time. He says, "The next guy that calls the hangar deck the roof of this place, we're going to send him home." [laughs] Or the flight deck, I guess it was. But, also the Navy was very strict about their rules of ship's company, like no liquor. We were not – we had brought liquor aboard in our seatbags, and we would observe the cocktail hour before the evening meal. You're not going to fly anywhere, because they had their own night fighters. And finally, our commanding officer at another meeting, he says, "Close the doors to your state rooms, so these poor guys that are in ship's company don't see you having a cocktail party," [laughs].
- Mark: So in terms of the mess, and that sort of thing – did you eat with the ship's crew, or how segregated were you?
- Todd: Oh no, the ward room is where the officers eat, and all officers eat in the ward room. And that's [coughs] – excuse me – that's where you went when you were at general quarters if you didn't have the hop. If you weren't supposed to fly, and they sounded general quarters, you're supposed to go to the ward room. Which, you're supposed to get there in - I've forgotten how many seconds he gave you. Because if you weren't there in that time, then they dogged down all the hatches in case you're hit, so that if water enters one compartment, it won't enter another. But the ward room was under eight inches of armor plate, so there was some protection there, you know. But when these two Japs – kamikazes hit, it didn't help, because – well, there were a lot of planes on deck, and all that 100 octane drained down into the holes and started on fire all over, you know. The Marines, we were lucky – we had the hop that day that we were hit, because the Navy was in the ready room being briefed for the next hop, and when those bombs hit, and I heard from somebody that was aboard and got out of it alright, that these guys were still sitting in their chairs, dead – but it's the vacuum that collapses your lungs – there's a vacuum immediately after that, and it explodes your lungs, actually. But we were lucky, we had the hop that day, so before the Japs hit. And those two Japs, incidentally, had followed a squadron back from Okinawa, that's the reason they weren't picked up on the radar. They had been right behind 'em.

- Mark: Now, when you're participating in a particular campaign, I'm sure you're very busy and occupied and that sort of thing, but you had to go between, like say, Iwo Jima and Okinawa and there's some time when you're not flying.
- Todd: Like, you mean, uh?
- Mark: Like between the campaigns.
- Todd: Well, the only thing you can do, see, that was all – after we took Iwo Jima, we pulled back to Ulithi for R&R, then we went to Okinawa, but there's no other place you can pull in, you know, for liberty.
- Mark: I was wondering when you weren't in combat, what you did to occupy your time. I imagine it was pretty boring on a ship like that.
- Todd: Yeah, well you're out there for combat. The only time you're not in combat is when you're re-provisioning. Though, you might get up on the hangar deck or the flight deck and sun. Some guys played bridge. I played a little of it, but I played it badly [laughs].
- Mark: Did you have trouble getting mail?
- Todd: Oh, you'd get bunches of it at one time. And what you'd do is sort it out chronologically so you get the time – but it was really – you know the mail call – it was – [hums a tune], and we used to kid – [to the same tune] “I got a letter, I got a letter, you got a got that post card,” [laughs].
- Mark: So by the time the atomic bomb was dropped, you were already on your way back?
- Todd: I was on our way back from Okinawa. I can't remember how far we were away from it, but it was of sight, you know.
- Mark: I'm sort of interested in your reaction when you heard that the Japanese were surrendering.
- Todd: When we heard that the Japanese were surrendering? Well that's – yeah –
- Mark: - The bomb was dropped and then they were going to surrender.
- Todd: Well, see, I was back in the States by the time they surrendered. That's what you mean.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Todd: I mean, when they really were surrendering on the Missouri battleship.
- Mark: Well, the VJ-Day was the 14th of August, and the actual ceremony itself was –
- Todd: Yeah, well see, we were hit on May 11th. Then I spend the night, May 12th on the Enterprise – yeah, the Enterprise. Then went to Yontan Airfield on Okinawa for about three days, then went

back, then went back to the States. By the time I got back to the States, it probably was, I think it was June 5th, as a matter of fact. But then, see, where was I? Oh, I was at El Centro – I had been sent to Atlanta to take a course in instrument instruction to instruct fighter pilots – give ‘em a quick course in instrument flying when I came back from overseas. Yeah, I mean, they all knew, but to give them a refresher course. I’d been sent to Atlanta to do that, and I went back to El Centro, California, and I had three, well they’d be students – they were all officers – be giving them this refresher course when the war was over. And that’s when we got the news, and all of us went into Hollywood from El Centro, California. Well, you’ve seen pictures of that, you know, with the sailor kissing this gal, and all that stuff. It was just great. My –

Mark: Was it a surprise? There was the saying – Golden Gate ’48 – there was the idea that the war was going to go on for a lot longer.

Todd: I don’t remember if I was surprised. Incidentally, while I was home on my 30 day leave, when I first got home, we got the telegram that my brother was missing in action. He was on a submarine. And a year later, they were just presumed dead. He never did come back. But that’s – but then I went back out and I went to this instrument instructor’s school, and I went to El Centro, then the war was over and I had enough points to get out.

Mark: No thought of staying in? Or was it -

Todd: Oh yes, yes, yes. I applied to stay in the regulars, but as soon as I found out my brother was missing, I was the sole surviving son, and I could have stayed in if I wanted, but I just decided to get out for my folks’ sake, you know.

Mark: So the war was over, and you’re out of the military, now you’re a fed. When it came to getting your life back on track – getting a job and a house and all that sort of thing, what were your priorities when you first got out of the service, and what did you do to pursue those goals?

Todd: I don’t really – I don’t remember that I had any. There were three men that were old enough to be my father that were starting a business, and they asked me if I wanted to come in, and I said no. Oh, I know what it was. I had only had three years of college – I figured I’d go back, get my last year of college. But I had enough military, I wasn’t going to go back to the Citadel. So I visited Madison, I visited Lawrence University – and everybody looked so childish to me, after having been in the service. I called up one of these guys – no, I bumped into him on the street – that had asked me to come in with him, I said, “Yeah, I think I’ll take a crack at it.” And we went into business called Air-cooled Power Equipment, and it was mostly farm machinery and engines. But after about a year or two, we had made a lot of money – you could sell anything. These guys wanted to – and we were a partnership, and in a partnership you have to pay tax on what the company owns, even if you don’t take the money out, so we had to borrow money to pay our taxes, because we needed the money. Well, these guys didn’t like that, and so my father bought out one of ‘em. Anyway, my father and I ended up with all the stock in that. And then we changed the name to Engine Power, which was not as restricting as Air-Cooled Power Equipment. And that’s – I renamed it that, but it was construction equipment for the rest of the time. I remained in that till I sold out to G.I. Case Company in 1973, and I’ve been retired ever since.

Mark: So getting a job after the war wasn't a problem for you?

Todd: No, no. [laughs]

Mark: There was a lot of fear. If you read some of the literature, there was the fear that we were going to have another Bonus March and all these kinds of things. A lot of things [unintelligible]. In your particular case –

Todd: Yeah but actually I don't think there was that much after World War II.

Mark: There wasn't?

Todd: No. I know that it was at Vietnam and all that, but I don't remember any of my friends saying, "Jeez, I wish I could get a job." I mean, they were there.

Mark: You found employment easily enough. In terms of finding a place to live, and that sort of thing –

Todd: Well, then I got married. Toby's my second wife. My first wife died in '88. I got married and borrowed on the G.I. Bill to buy a quarter of a four-family apartment, and finally paid that off and years later we moved to Oconomowoc, where we are now. Technically, Toby and I are residents of Florida now, but we come up here in the summer. We're here about four weeks.

Mark: So it costs you just –

Todd: Yeah –

[tape cuts out]

Mark: - finances – I'm interested in the use of the veterans' benefits. When did you use them? Is it right after the war, or -

Todd: Yeah, as soon as I was going to get married – I was living at home up until the time I'm gonna get married, and so then now we have to find a place to live, and the G.I. Bill was available. You could use it for that, or you could use it for college, or something, you know, and I used it for my quarter of that apartment.

Mark: Would you have been able to purchase the property at that time, had it not been for the G.I. Bill?

Todd: Not personally, unless I would have – actually, to get into this business, I borrowed \$5,000 from my father to get in, but I didn't have any money personally.

Mark: So you didn't use the educational part of the G.I. Bill?

Todd: No, and I never did graduate.

- Mark: Any other benefits you may have used at some time? Any medical or anything like that?
- Todd: No, I think you can only use the G.I. Bill for one thing. Well, I suppose you could use it for medical, though. And I never was wounded or anything.
- Mark: So no sort of physical or emotional readjustments you'd have to go through when you came back?
- Todd: No, no. I was always kind of odd, you know [laughter].
- Mark: Last thing I want to discuss: veterans organizations and that sort of thing. On the data sheet I had you fill out, you mentioned American Legion, you didn't mention when you joined it.
- Todd: Well, frankly, I joined – I got a letter from an all Marine post in Milwaukee, down on 11th and Highland, and so I joined that.
- Mark: This is soon after the war?
- Todd: Yeah. And I went to one meeting, and I never went back, and I'll tell you why. It was all Marines, but there was a – I don't know if you know what a BAM was, a "Beautiful American Marine."
- Mark: Yes, I remember.
- Todd: Or "Broad As Marine," [laughs]. But she, in a Marine uniform, met at the door, she says "Hi, gyreen, hang your gear up on the bulkhead," all, you know, salty language. And it was kind of like that, and I just didn't get anything out of it. I never went back. Now, I belong to an American Legion post up in Cable only because I know the guy that was president at the time, and I sent my dues in every year, but I never have been [unintelligible].
- Mark: When did you rejoin the post up in Cable?
- Todd: When did I rejoin? Oh, that's been twenty years ago.
- Mark: So, well after the war.
- Todd: Oh yeah, I just did it to help this guy out. I pay my dues.
- Mark: But you'd had enough of the military – the "Go, military!" lifestyle, I guess?
- Todd: [laughs] Yeah.
- Mark: Yeah. Well those are pretty much all the questions I had. Is there anything else you'd like to –
- Todd: No, I think I've pretty much covered it.
- Mark: OK. Well, thanks for coming in.

Todd: Well, OK.

Mark: I appreciate it.

Todd: Thank you.